

**United States National Statement**  
**201st Executive Board Session**  
**April 24, 2017**

Thank you, President of the Executive Board, Madam Director-General, and fellow Member State delegations.

With an election for a new Director-General and Executive Board Members scheduled for this coming November, this seems an appropriate time to underscore where the United States hopes this agency is headed, and what priorities we believe appropriate for its new leadership and governing bodies.

As we have made clear in New York and Washington, the UN system must be focused on solving problems, contributing to global peace and security, and making decisions needed to settle the underlying causes of conflicts.

We must move away from an overemphasis on actions and decisions that are not pragmatically grounded in a results-oriented approach, as well as “zero-sum” approaches, and focus instead on what the UN and its technical agencies can contribute to achieving positive outcomes on the ground. Member States need to remain sensitive to the fact that votes on some UNESCO resolutions can do far more to perpetuate tensions than to resolve conflicts.

Now, UNESCO has a critical role to play in advancing education, safeguarding and preserving World Heritage, advancing scientific endeavors, protecting journalists, and fostering freedom of expression. In each area, its impact and success will continue to depend on its credibility among nations and their people, its management, and especially its ability to show demonstrable and measurable results consistent with the 2030 Agenda.

A new Director-General of UNESCO will need to position UNESCO as the undisputed leader in these areas, able to deliver where other organizations cannot. A sense of urgency must be the hallmark of each and every staff member, from the top to the bottom, recognizing the need for clarity of purpose, speed, and impact.

Fortunately, we see UNESCO taking leadership and positive steps in many key fields, including in the important area of education. For example, as we often highlight in the “Group of Friends of PVE Education” which supports its work, UNESCO is the only UN agency in the process of developing educational tools to deter youth radicalization to violence. It also seeks to promote education, including about the Holocaust and the prevention of genocide. Its policy recommendations to Member States are helping them to prepare national PVE plans to support the UN’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism -- an invaluable resource for governments worldwide.

Likewise, UNESCO's efforts to bring major stakeholders together to staunch the growing problem of illicit trafficking in cultural artifacts is crucial to the fight against terror in the Near East, in Africa, and worldwide. Many in the international community are engaging in extraordinary new efforts in this area, which is greatly appreciated. The United States was pleased to participate in the first-ever G-7 culture ministerial in Florence, as well as to co-sponsor the French and Italian-led UN Security Council Resolution 2347 concerning the protection of cultural heritage in the event of armed conflict.

And, of course UNESCO remains the undisputed champion of our shared World Heritage, including nearly two dozen sites in the United States that help highlight our national treasures – both natural and man-made – to the rest of the world, bringing in much-needed tourist revenue to communities across the United States. Designations of six U.S. cities as part of the global “Creative Cities” network is also a valued distinction that brings American creative energies to the world, and the world's creative energies and ideas to the United States.

UNESCO is also crucially important in advocating with governments that they improve protections for journalists and combat impunity for crimes committed against them, including killings and harassment. We welcome the leadership of Austria, Sweden, the Netherlands, and others in this area.

UNESCO's excellent work to advance science, including in the areas of oceans research, disaster risk reduction, and groundwater management, among others, brings together experts and expert institutions to help solve the development challenges of UNESCO's Member States, which is vital to saving lives and achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda. Our experts have a long and productive working relationship with UNESCO, including within the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission where we have again offered to serve as an active member on its Executive Council.

Still, there remain areas for improvement in the area of management reform. While slow in arriving, we welcome an integrated budget framework and the internal culture change which is reflected by its adoption. This should include in the next biennium a careful plan to initiate a well-coordinated, strategic approach to mobilize resources from both public and private sources, aligned to core priorities and adequately back-stopped by adequate staff and front-office leadership.

Of course, we look forward to progress on increasing the completion rate of audit recommendations, strengthening the performance of the field network and Category II institutes, as well as general improvements in the area of human resources management.

To the last point, we are in the process of developing an intern program with leading U.S. tertiary education institutions that are part of the UNESCO University Chairs program, to bring high-caliber U.S. student volunteers to UNESCO – at no cost to the agency - to strengthen its workforce and to benefit from the expertise of these top academic institutions.

We wish to thank all those Member States, institutions, and experts who have joined us in encouraging UNESCO to broaden its work in the area of public-private partnerships. We urge UNESCO and all its partners to continue carrying these initiatives forward.

While we continue to seek ways to align our policies and programs in those areas mentioned above, we remain disappointed to see yet another politicized text on “Occupied Palestine” that – while shorter in length – does nothing to bring the parties together or help resolve the underlying conflict. This, and a second text on “education institutions in the occupied Arab territories,” similarly one-sided and disappointing, does not belong here at UNESCO, and simply serves to distract the Organization and its membership from the real and important challenges we face.

As our Ambassador to the United Nations recently said, the United States is determined to stand up to the UN's anti-Israel bias that is long overdue for change. The United States will not hesitate to speak out against such biases in defense of our friends and allies.

It is unfortunate that this agency, one in which we played a key role in founding, and whose experts and institutes conduct strong and important work in many fields, continues to be held hostage to this one issue.

We stand at a crossroads. This organization was founded to promote the objectives of peace and common welfare of humankind, but it will only achieve that lofty goal by focusing its efforts and operating as a disciplined custodian of public funds. In the context of increasing politicization of many issues, we urge UNESCO and its Member States to recommit themselves to achieving real progress on the core issues that are outlined in its constitution; to continue to look for ways to implement strong management, reform, and fiscal responsibility; and truly to be guided by the ideals and values that spurred its creation.